



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tulare Basin Land Protection Planning Study

Planning Update 3, March 2003

Greetings!

This is the third in a series of Planning Updates provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to keep you informed and involved in the Service's planning process for protecting wetland and associated upland habitats within the Tulare Basin.

Tulare Basin Wildlife Management Area Proposal

The Service is studying a proposal to establish the Tulare Basin Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This WMA would conserve wetland and associated upland habitats as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. For this project, habitat protection could be achieved by the Service acquiring conservation easements from property owners who are willing sellers.

As part of the planning process for establishing new refuge system lands, an Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan, will be developed. Three alternatives will be analyzed in the documents, the preliminary alternatives are described on page 2. The preliminary alternatives are based on the Service's wildlife habitat conservation goals, and issues and concerns raised at the public meetings and in your letters and e-mail messages. Your comments on the preliminary alternatives are welcome.

*Wetland habitat in the Tulare Basin.
Photo, Scott Frazer, USFWS*



What Are the Preliminary Alternatives?

Alternative 1. No Action, under this status quo alternative:

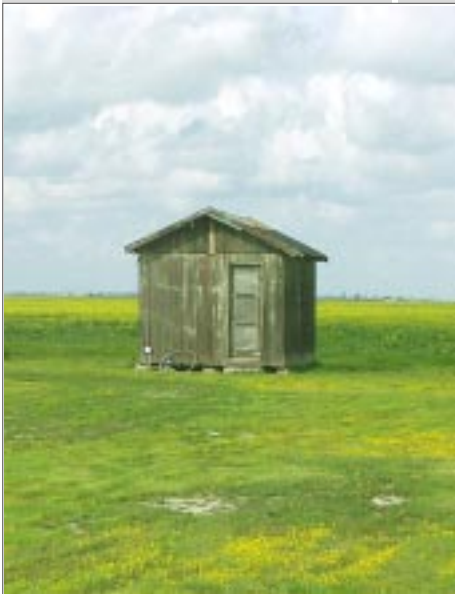
- The Service would not establish a Tulare Basin WMA, nor acquire interest in the lands in the study area.
- Future land use changes would be guided by county zoning ordinances.
- Additional losses of wetland habitats would be expected in the future.

Alternative 2. Under this alternative:

- The Service would establish a WMA by acquiring conservation easements from willing sellers, on up to approximately 14,000 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats.
- These easements would be managed as part of the Tulare Basin WMA.
- The WMA would provide minimum protection to private wetlands necessary to conserve wetland dependant wildlife and native habitats.

Alternative 3. Under this alternative:

- Potential fee acquisition of not more than 2,000 acres from willing sellers would occur, as well as permanent protection of conservation easement lands identified under Alternative 2.
- Protecting high quality or unique wetland habitats or connecting similar areas of high quality habitat, would be the Service's focus for the additional 2,000 acres.



Photo, Scott Frazer, USFWS
The Old Tulare Duck Club Cabin.



Canada geese frequent the Tulare Basin.

What Happens Next?

A schedule of the key planning steps follows. Unforeseen circumstances could cause schedule changes. We will keep you informed if any major planning dates change. The Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan will be sent to everyone on the update mailing list and to public libraries in the project area.

Public Scoping and Comment Period_____ Completed

Review Public Comments_____Completed

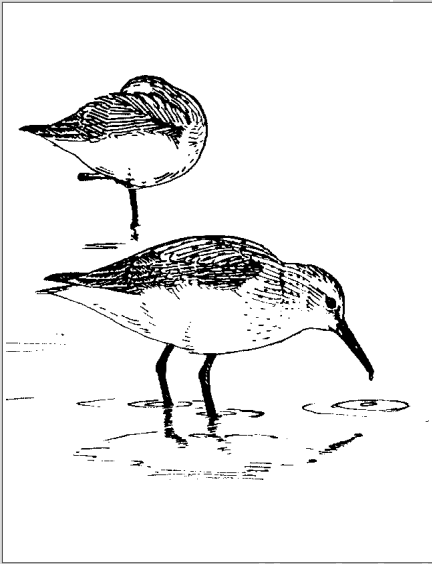
Planning Update 3 developed providing
Preliminary Alternatives for public comment _____ Completed

**Public Comment Period on the
Preliminary Alternatives_____ April thru May, 2003**

Draft Planning Documents available
for Public Review and Comment_____ Summer 2003

Final Planning Documents and
Notice of Decision Released_____ Fall 2003

What Other Alternatives were Considered?



The shallow wetlands in the Tulare Basin provide ideal foraging for shorebirds such as these dunlin.

The following alternatives have been considered, however, they will not be assessed in any detail for the current Tulare Basin land conservation planning study.

All fee acquisition: A conservation program based primarily on acquiring easements rather than fee acquisitions, could adequately achieve the land protection goals for this project and would cost less than an all fee acquisition program.

Acquiring 10,000 acres in habitat corridors for listed species: This option would add considerable complexity to the project which could substantially increase the time needed to complete the planning process. Significant delays in implementing a land conservation program would likely result in additional wildlife habitat losses.

Accepting administrative jurisdiction: This would involve lands enrolled in either the USDA Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) or Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) land retirement program. These existing protections are adequate for the lands currently enrolled.

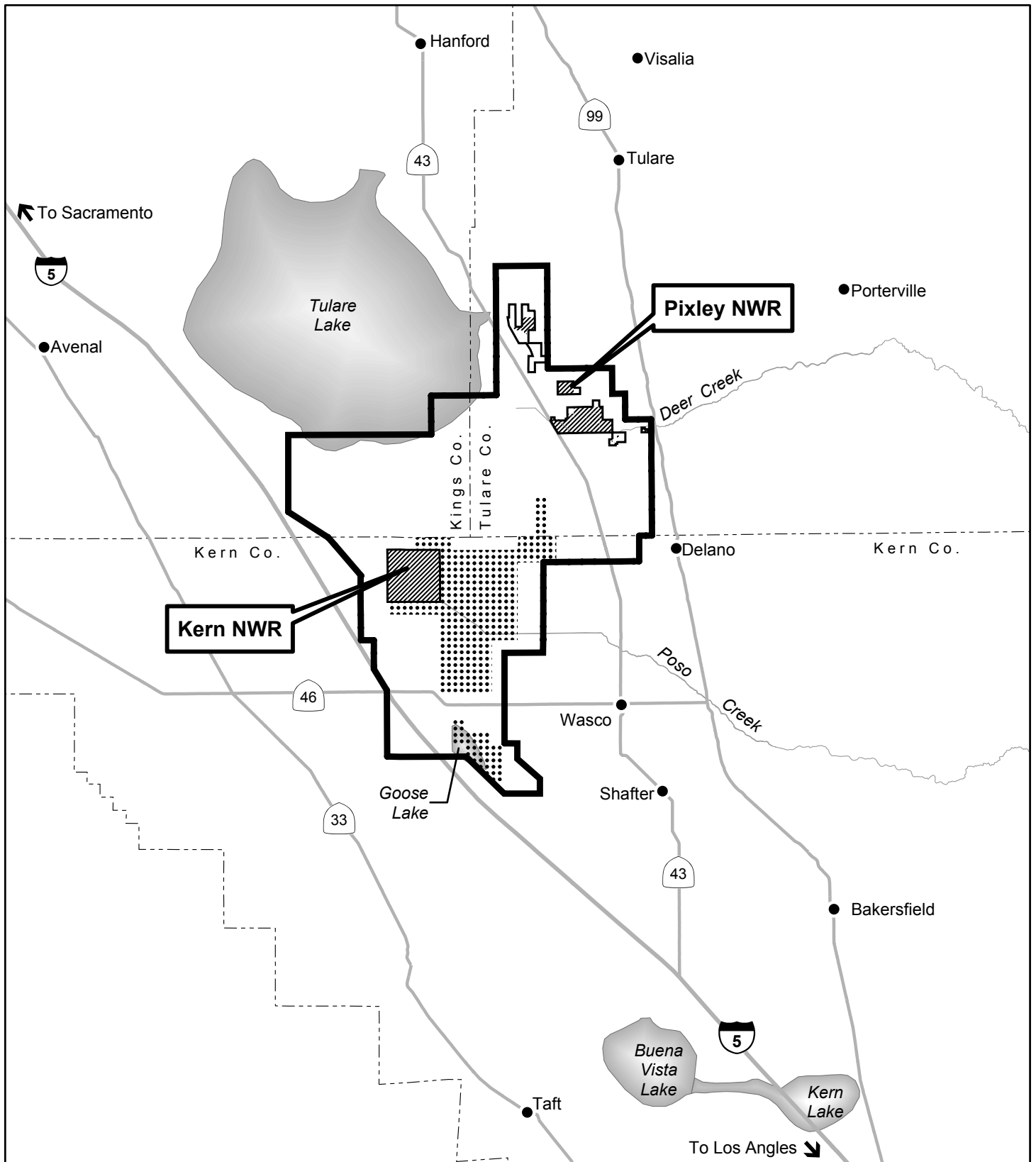
Establishing a smaller project area: This would leave out important wetland and associated upland habitats that are necessary to meet the project goals of supporting long term viability of private wetlands and supporting the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture (CVHJV) migratory bird population goals for the Tulare Basin as well as the Pacific Flyway.

Establishing an expanded study area: The resulting area would contain large gaps in protected habitats, and lands requiring significant restoration. Expanding the proposed area could also cause delays in completing the study.

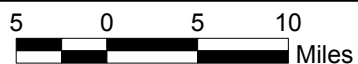


Ducks at dusk in the Tulare Basin. Photo, Scott Frazer, USFWS.

Tulare Basin Study Area



CA/NV Refuge Planning Office - June 2002



- Approved Refuge Boundaries
- Tulare Basin Study Area

- FWS Lands
- Focus Area

- Historic Lakes



USE OUR E-MAIL OR WEBSITE

E-mail: FW1PlanningComments
@r1.fws.gov

(Please use "Tulare
Basin" in the subject.)

Refuge Planning Web site:
<http://pacific.fws.gov/planning>

Who Do I Contact?

Your participation is encouraged throughout the process. Please send your written comments to Scott Frazer or Richard Smith as follows, or via e-mail to FW1PlanningComments@r1.fws.gov.

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Address correction requested

